

Message Text

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43

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCCT-01 SY-05 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 A-01 OPR-02 OMB-01 ACDA-07

ARA-06 EA-07 /081 W

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O 171420Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7279

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 2348

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PFOR, SY, LE

SUBJECT: SECURITY SITUATION ALONG DAMASCUS-BEIRUT ROAD

1. FOLLOWING ARE PRINCIPAL OBSERVATIONS OF CODEL
MATHIAS AND DRIVER WHO ACCOMPANIED THEM DAMASCUS-
CHTAURA-BEIRUT-DAMASCUS ON APRIL 16-17.

A. SYRIAN TROOP PRESENCE: SYRIAN TROOPS ARE IN CONTROL
OF MASNA' BORDER STATION AND IN TENTS AROUND
PERIMETER OF MASNA BUT NO ARMOR OR ARTILLERY VISIBLE.
PHOTOS OF PRES. ASAD ABOUND AT MASNA PASSPORT/CUSTOMS
FACILITIES. CARS WAVED THROUGH WITHOUT STOPPING FOR
PASSPORT FORMALITIES.

B. FATAH-KHATIB FORCES: FATAH SECURITY VEHICLE MET
CODEL AT MASNA AND TOOK THEM TO FATAH HEADQUARTERS AT
TANAYEL JUST EAST OF CHTAURA TO AWAIT CAR TO TRANSPORT
CODEL TO BEIRUT AND SECURITY GUARDS TO ACCOMPANY CODEL.
FATAH MAJ. SUHEIL, ENGLISH SPEAKER ORIGINALLY
FROM NABLUS, IN CHARGE OF ESCORT AND APPARENTLY IN CHARGE
OF FATAH HEADQUARTERS AT TANAYEL. MAJ. ABU DALAH, ALSO
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ENGLISH SPEAKER, ACCOMPANIED CODEL BACK TO DAMASCUS

MORNING APRIL 17. CODEL MET AT TANAYEL THREE INDIVIDUALS WHO CALLED THEMSELVES MARONITE FATAH MEMBERS FROM ZAHLE; TWO SPOKE ENGLISH, AND ONE CLAIMED HE HAD STUIDED FOR TWO MONTHS AT GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY SOMETIME IN PAST AND THAT HIS BROTHER NOW LEBANESE VICE CONSUL IN TRIPOLI, LIBYA. THREE APPARENTLY NON-ARAB INDIVIDUALS IN BATTLE GARB WALKED INTO FATAH HEADQUARTERS AND IMMEDIATELY DUCKED OUT OF SIGHT WHEN THEY SAW SENATOR'S PARTY. SENATOR AND STAFF AIDE BELIEVE AT LEAST TWO OF THESE INDIVIDUALS WERE CUBAN. ONE MEMBER OF PARTY ASKED FATAH MAN WHO THESE WERE, AND WAS TOLD THEY PERHAPS "INDONESIAN OR JAPANESE", THAT HE DID NOT KNOW FOR CERTAIN BUT THAT "WE HAVE SOME FIGHTERS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES SERVING WITH US." MAJ. SUHEIL STATED THAT SYRIAN TROOPS WERE NOT IN DAHR AL-BAIDAR. OTHER FATAH PEOPLE TOLD CODEL AND DRIVER THAT "OUR PEOPLE" CONTROL ROAD BETWEEN MASNA AND DAHR AL-BAIDAR. DRIVER ASKED THEM ABOUT KHATIB'S LEBANESE ARAB ARMY AND WAS TOLD "THEY ARE WITH US." FATAH MAN TALKING WITH DRIVER POINTED TO ONE OF MEN ACCOMPANYING MAJ. SUHEIL AND SAID, "HE IS WITH KHATIB." PARTY ALSO OBSERVED TWO RANGE ROVERS GASSING UP JUST OUTSIDE MASNA WHICH IDENTIFIED BY WRITING ALONG DOOR AS "LEBANESE ARAB ARMY". ONE ROADBLOCK MIDWAY BETWEEN MASNA AND TANAYEL MANNED BY FORCES WHO FATAH SAID BELONG TO "US". DRIVER TRIED TO ENGAGE THEM IN CONVERSATION TO CHECK IF THEY PALESTINIANS, LEBANESE OR SYRIANS BUT THEY REFUSED TO TALK AND WAVED HIM ON. BETWEEN CHTAURA AND BEIRUT (VIA ALEY-ARAMOUN DETOUR) THEY PASSED APPROXIMATELY SEVEN ROADBLOCKS BUT HAD NO DIFFICULTY NEGOTIATING ANY OF THEM. WERE TOLD ALL ROADBLOCKS WERE MANNED BY FATAH. IN ANY CASE THEY WERE STRUCK BY CALM BUSINESSLIKE CHECK. SAID IN SOME PLACES ROAD ALMOST WASHED OUT BY RAINS. DEPARTED FATAH HEADQUARTERS TANAYEL 1800 APRIL 16 AND ARRIVED AT ARAFAT'S HEADQUARTERS AT 2030 SAME NIGHT. APRIL 17 THEY DEPARTED THEIR HOTEL IN BEIRUT AT 0930 AND ARRIVED DAMASCUS 1200 UNDER FATAH ESCORT.

C. INCIDENTAL OBSERVATIONS: CODEL'S PARTY NOTICED TRUCK CARRYING SOME TROOPS IN SYRIA WHICH HEADING TOWARD GENERAL AREA OF BORDER WHICH WAS IDENTIFIED AS "SAIQA FORCES" NEAR LICENSE. ALSO PASSED IN NO-MAN'S LAND BETWEEN
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LEBANESE AND SYRIAN BORDER POSTS JEEP HEADING INTO LEBANON ON WHICH WRITTEN "PALESTINE LIBERATION ARMY". THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE OF SYRIAN MILITARY PRESENCE BEYOND MASNA.

COMMENT: DRIVER REFERRED TO PARA 1 WAS EMBASSY DRIVER WHO DELIVERED CODEL TO CHTAURA AND THEN RETURNED TO DAMASCUS.

2. FOR NEA/ARN. SENATOR MATHIAS REQUESTS YOU PASS

COPY THIS MESSAGE TO HIS OFFICE.

MURPHY

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